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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/26/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [FR](#) [LE](#) [SY](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: FRENCH NEXT STEPS ON LEBANON

REF: A. (A) BEIRUT 1665

[1](#)B. (B) PARIS 4313
[1](#)C. AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt for reasons 1.4. (b), (d).

[1](#)1. (C) In an unfortunately abbreviated meeting, French MFA DAS-equivalent for the Levant Ludovic Pouille gave us a quick update October 25 on how the French intend to move forward on Lebanon over the next couple of weeks.

--FM Kouchner intends to continue his process of pressing the Lebanese parties to identify and elect a compromise president. With the next deadline in mind, i.e., the parliamentary session now set for November 12, Kouchner plans to return to Beirut o/a November 10 with his Italian and Spanish counterparts once more in tow and joined by the Saudi and Egyptian FMs as well as Arab League Secretary General Amr Musa. Beirut would be the only stop with no side trips to Damascus or anywhere else.

--French special envoy for Lebanon Jean-Claude Cousseran will depart for Jeddah October 26 to meet Saudi FM Sa,ud al-Faisal the next day. Cousseran would travel the evening of October 27 for Damascus for meetings with FM Mu,allim and VP Shara, October 28. Pouille initially added that Cousseran would go on to Tehran, but he stated October 26 that Iran was no longer on Cousseran,s itinerary (see comment for more information). Without offering an explanation, Pouille agreed with our observation that Cairo was not part of Cousseran,s swing this time around.

--Kouchner plans to meet on the margins with Syrian FM Mu,allim at the Istanbul ministerial on Iraq in early November. After reporting October 26 that Cousseran would no longer be going to Tehran, Pouille said that Kouchner will also meet Iranian FM Motakki in Istanbul.

[1](#)2. (C) Time did not permit Pouille to provide details on the message Cousseran would convey to the Syrians. He nonetheless gave the impression it would be focused entirely on Lebanon and repeat what the French have previously stated by way of warning the Syrians not to interfere in the Lebanese election process and offering a renewed bilateral dialogue should the election pass peacefully.

[1](#)3. (C) Comment: As previously reported, the French are increasingly worried as the clock ticks down and no clear frontrunner has emerged among Lebanese presidential candidates. The question of Cousseran going to Tehran seems to have gotten tangled up in the now difficult French

relationship with Iran due to its tough stance on the nuclear issue (septel). Pouille asserted that Cousseran would go to Tehran October 25 with complete confidence that the decision had been taken and the visit would proceed. When we raised this visit later in the day with Franck Gellet, Pouille,s colleague handling Iran, Iraq, and the Gulf states, Gellet noted that he understood the decision was still pending and likely to be negative. Kouchner or his staff seems to have decided that whatever Lebanon-related business Cousseran would have transacted with the Iranians can best be done in Istanbul along with other issues troubling the strained bilateral relationship. As a last note, we pass along that Pouille was dismissive of a &half-plus-plus8 approach to the Lebanese election. A scenario that would effectively exclude Hizballah from the vote, and thus not lead to a &consensus8 candidate was not something France could support.

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